

Spaceforsoul

www.spaceforsoul.org.uk



Newsletter July 2023

STOP PRESS: Dave Tomlinson is coming to Bristol!! See below

Dear Friends

I am writing this hot off our AGM yesterday. If you think AGMs and Constitutions are boring, Think again! We had some great discussions that made us think deeply about what we mean by "progressive Christianity", and what it might mean to others; whether we should include the word "Christianity" at all; what we mean by "safe space"; and how we can ensure our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion really says what we want it to say. Everyone contributed and it was a discussion which was within a really caring and thoughtful space between us.

We have signed off an amended constitution which can only be amended at an AGM (I have put the important amended paragraphs at the end of the newsletter) but we agreed that there is room for further discussion and it can be amended at the next AGM if we wish to.

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1. Clowning came to Space for Soul in June!

To open we listened to the Beatles, 'The Fool on the Hill' <https://youtu.be/wsRatIMUSu8>

and looked what some interpretations of what the lyrics may mean
<https://www.lyricinterpretations.com/beatles/the-fool-on-the-hill>

<https://www.movement.org.uk/blog/beatles-fool-hill>

Catherine shared with us a little of her experience of 'clowning'. It was offered as a

way of being in touch with the body and giving expression to feelings. We were invited to join in with some gentle clowning exercises such as saying our name with a simple (but exaggerated) gesture and then have others reflect that back. Spontaneity and not over thinking it was key. It sounds simple, it sounds daft, but it was fun and I haven't laughed so much for ages! We reflected that it was similar to the idea of 'focussing' which we covered last month and can be a spiritual exercise to make connection with the inner-self.

We were reminded of Roly Bain the Vicar Clown who did church in a very different way and is greatly missed. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/aug/21/the-rev-roly-bain-obituary>

We closed our session with a mediation called 'The Clown' by John Bell from his book, 'He was in the world'. <https://www.ionabooks.com/product/he-was-in-the-world/>

And for those who wanted the recipe for the munchies you will find it here-

<https://hodmedods.co.uk/blogs/recipes/quinoa-and-chocolate-fridge-cake?pos=3&sid=ca7eea1f7&ss=r>

Enjoy!

Meryl

I thought it was a great session, mainly because it made me laugh a lot! The best bits for me were when we were taking part in an activity together, inspiring each other, and the more ridiculous peoples actions became as we went along , the more we laughed.

I realised how we can take spirituality and ourselves too seriously sometimes and it's good to let go , be silly and see things from a different perspective.

Lovely session. Thanks to everyone and to Catherine especially.

Sarah

My understanding of the fundamental idea being presented was that clowning is about spontaneously feeling what is in your body and letting it express itself physically, indeed to exaggerate it, not hide it away. Someone drew the parallel with Vicki's session the previous month on focusing being also about feeling what is in your body.

I realised that my difficulty with this is not so much feeling forced to conform to ideas of what is acceptable but more fundamentally in not knowing what I feel at all. My anxiety was more to do with just feeling lost and confused when my turn came rather than feeling shy or stupid. I think as a likely autistic person, I struggle to notice my own feelings, both physical and emotional. However, I also have a fairly low awareness of how I come across to others, so have less self-consciousness about possibly looking stupid. I think I could benefit from learning to tune into myself, but this would need to be done carefully to avoid overwhelm. These two sessions have definitely been food for thought.

Fran

2. Afterlife?" What do you believe?

If you've been brought up in the Christian faith the message about afterlife is very

simple: there are two places to go to after death, heaven or hell. Through believing in Jesus, and only through believing in Jesus, a person can get to heaven. Otherwise they go to the other place! It is interesting that the Jewish faith does not share in this belief.

This was an opportunity for us to explore our beliefs and experiences without the fear of being condemned as blasphemous or heretical. For a while now it has seemed very strange to me that what people are talking about when they use the term God, Yahweh, Allah and so on, is about something we can't see, touch or hear in the normal sense of the words, that is, something mystical and spiritual, yet if someone talks within the church about mystical or spiritual experiences it's frowned upon. Yet some of the most important founding fathers and mothers of the Christian faith and other faiths were Mystics. And if you're a Roman Catholic and you have a vision of the long dead "Virgin Mary" it will probably be celebrated and might become the cause for an annual festival!

Some of us shared examples of experiences where we have either felt the presence of those who have departed this life or who seemed to have special abilities to do so or to see "beyond". Anna and I share experiences which we have had where we have felt a loved one depart even when we were no where near them and didn't know they were about to die. We also made a friend, not knowing that he was a "medium, - a title which conjures up ideas of charlatans, which often they are, - but we can assure you that our friend is one of the most genuine and honest people you could meet. He lives in a "thin" world where those who have departed are never far away. Our experiences with him were mind blowing. Ironically, it was those experiences, leading me to the utterly invincible conviction that we do have a spirit which doesn't die, that led me back to a faith in God. Yet I was never able to share that in church.

It was really good to be able to do so with a wonderful group of people in Soul Space, even over Zoom. (Why not! Years ago people would have thought that talking to and seeing people who were miles apart was something impossible and loopy!)

Anna and I are happy to share our experiences with anyone who is interested.

Anne

3. Forthcoming events

Wednesday July 19th 7.00 p.m. Ally and Tim will be facilitating our session from their narrow boat *somewhere in England!*

Free will:

Do you have any choice in the way your life goes? As everything is a consequence of everything else does this mean that we don't actually have any free will, but are just following a pre-ordained story? If this is so, is it a good or bad thing?

Sunday August 6th Picnic and walk together at Blaise Castle. Meet by the picnic

tables at the cafe. Time to be advised by email later this month. (11am or 12pm TBA)
No Zoom Soul Space in August
Sunday September 3rd: Soul Space in Bristol. **Venue to be advised** as the Old Library will be shut for renovation and repairs.

Wednesday September 20th Soul Space Zoom

Sunday October 1st: **Dave Tomlinson**, author of **How to be a Bad Christian and a Better Human Being** and **Black Sheep and Prodigals** – amongst many other titles, and our weekly progressive faith speaker on Holy Shed

4. Our new Space for Soul Co-ordinating group and officers

We are delighted to welcome Kate Clover and Catherine Feeny to the Co-ordinating group. Kate has also volunteered to take over from Julian as Treasurer. Nirma was elected Secretary and Anne as Chair.

The full CG is now: Anne (Chair), Catherine, Julian, Kate(Treasurer.), Linda and Meryl and Nirma (Secretary).

5. Revised Constitution (July 2023) Key changes shown in **bold** and *italic*

4. Membership

Anyone who supports the aims of the community and participates in its activities **in accordance with our ethos** can become a member of Space For Soul on completion of the membership form. There is no membership fee and membership is open-ended.

Membership is, however, optional and all Space For Soul events are open to both members and non-members. Membership benefits include entitlement to vote at the AGM and other General meetings and to serve on the Space for Soul Co-ordinating Group and any other steering groups set up by the Co-ordinating Group.

All members and service users are expected to respect both our ethos as a community, our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and our commitment to creating a safe space and safeguarding:

Our ethos

As a community, we are committed to enabling people to experience a sense of belonging, of being accepted and valued, of being heard and understood and of having a voice in the process of decision-making. We are also committed to communicating openly, honestly and respectfully with each other at all levels of the community and to dealing with any difficulties and disagreements that arise between us with tolerance, sensitivity and compassion.

Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion

As a community, Space for Soul embraces a **Progressive Christian** spirituality which is open **to people of all faiths and none and which is** inclusive and holistic; which values difference and diversity; and which believes in the equality of all people. We are committed to avoiding any form of discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, ethnic or national origin, religious or spiritual tradition, sexuality, **gender identity** or disability.

Our commitment to creating a safe space and safeguarding

Space for Soul believes in a shared world where diversity and different identities are cherished, where all can live free from the fear of violence and abuse, with dignity and respect. We expect all our members to abide with this ethos and to help ensure that all our

meetings and gatherings provide a safe space for all.